

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 709

AL 002 334

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TITLE Getting Down to the Grass Roots: Affiliate Affairs.
PUB DATE Mar 70
NOTE 9p.; Paper read at the Fourth Annual TESOL Convention, San Francisco, March 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.55
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education, Bilingual Students, Child Language, *Community Cooperation, Educational Programs, *English (Second Language), Language Instruction, Professional Associations
IDENTIFIERS Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, TESOL

ABSTRACT

This paper argues the case for the establishment of local affiliates of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The author considers the process of language acquisition ("the central business of growing up and of becoming a useful member of society") and the role that both formal and informal education play in it. The author finds the area at which language and education intersect very important, because it is at this point that the child learns special uses of English such as reading and writing and the use of the "standard" forms of his language. This area is especially important for those students whose native language is not English, but it was only with the passing of the Bilingual Education Act that the special needs of such students were recognized. The TESOL organization, although instrumental in getting teachers involved in dealing with the problems of non-native speakers, does not really reach enough people. Local affiliates of TESOL could, however, perform the necessary function of "getting experts, teachers, and community...together to talk about and work out strategies to handle their problems." The programs of the New Mexico Association for TESOL and Bilingual Education, of which the author is president, are discussed in order to illustrate the role which local affiliates can play in making bilingual education programs more effective. (FWB)

ED037709

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Getting Down to the Grass Roots: Affiliate Affairs

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This paper was read at the Fourth Annual Conven-
tion of TESOL, San Francisco, March 18-21, 1970.

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Let me first try to explain why I think we need local affiliates. I believe it arises from the importance of the area we are concerned with, which is the intersection of language and education.

In order to become a fully-fledged member of a society, a child spends the first part of his life working at the acquisition of what is best called communicative competence. Included in this is what Chomsky calls linguistic competence--knowledge of the rules of the language--but equally important for adequate socialization is knowledge of the rules of what to say, and when to say it. These are rules that tell us to say "Good morning" to our boss, and "hi" to our friends; to say "Bon appetit" to someone eating in French, but "Excuse me" to someone eating in English; to say "Bitte schön" when we give someone something in German, but not to say "Please" when we give someone something in English. And there are rules for bilinguals like "You speak English at work, but Spanish with your mother at home", or "You use your native Indian language in the Kiva and on the Plaza of the pueblo, and English when you meet the same person in Albuquerque"; and rules for bidialectals like "You won't get a job in the bank talking Black English, but you must use it with soul brothers".

The learning of all these rules is a long business; children start when they are born, and keep on acquiring

them until they become fully accepted members of their groups. And then, if later we want to join another group (to talk like a university student, or a high school teacher, or as a linguist), we have to start learning a whole new set of rules. While we're acquiring these rules about how to talk (and write), and when to say what how, we're also busy acquiring things to say about them, and reorganising our perceptions of the outside world, and how to express (and store them in our memory). Now all this is extremely important; it's the central business of growing up, and of becoming a useful member of society. That's the language part.

The education part is that society tries to help us along in a number of ways. Probably, when all is said and done, the most important part of the help is in giving us some models for us to investigate, and then letting us know how good our guesses are about the rules explaining the models. All of this happens in a pretty unorganized but very effective way, where children do the hardest part of acquiring language from their mothers or anyone else around them. And then comes the other part of the help: formal education. Society calls on certain people to use certain places and times to speed up the process of socialization and preparation of its young. Of course school

does a lot more than teach language, but it is at the intersection of language and education that some very important things happen.

The first of these has been pretty apparent for a long time: school is where one is taught some special uses of language (reading and writing particularly) and encouraged in the fullest development of a special form of language, called by teachers something like "correct English (or Spanish)" or "good English", and called by linguists something like "standard middle-class formal English". How this should be done is of course a key and long established concern of teachers. And when people get concerned, they set up organizations to share their concern, and so we have the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association and so on.

All this seemed enough for a while, until suddenly some people started to notice that we had missed the second thing going on. Teachers generally had assumed that their students all spoke the same language and dialect as they did. (American teachers are of course middle class, and speak a form of standard middle class English). But suddenly we noticed that a lot of our students spoke a different language, not to mention a different dialect. How many, we

still don't know; one guess is that a quarter of the people in the United States can speak another language and ten per cent speak another language natively.

The result is the recent history of the Bilingual Education Act, and getting in too early to get its name right, TESOL. As I have argued elsewhere, in dealing with the problems of non-English speakers, there is no reasonable separation to be made between TESOL and Bilingual Education; first, by definition, we are teaching bilinguals; second, the most reasonable strategy seems to be to teach someone in his native language while he is learning enough English to decide what language to learn the rest of his curriculum in.

In explaining why TESOL needs affiliates, let me go back to the reason for establishing TESOL itself. Before TESOL, there were plenty of concerned people, generally at universities, interested in teaching English as a second language. They got together quite often, in various very useful associations and self-perpetuating committees, and considered the problems. Some of them trained teachers; all were ready to come and tell teachers what they should do. And with the help of some NDEA money, their message, their panaceas, and their vocabulary got pretty widely spread, so that every administrator now knows that linguistics is the answer, and every teacher swears by (even if she doesn't use)

contrastive analysis and pattern practice. But I suspect, and those of you who've looked around carefully will probably agree, that this hasn't got too far in practice, or started to do too much for the individual child, when his language intersects with his education.

So TESOL was a major attempt to get teachers involved, and so ~~get~~ their teaching improved. The annual convention and the Quarterly have done a magnificent job of this, but the numbers effected are still too small, the tendency is still too much one way.

The key role of the regional affiliate, and even more of its city or school branch, will be to develop greater participation, numerically as well as greater in depth. The way in which our New Mexico affiliate developed will show you the deep needs and the possibilities.

Plans for establishing the New Mexico Association grew up in the plane back from the 1969 TESOL Convention, where we wondered how to take advantage of the changes in the TESOL Constitution permitting affiliates. By March 20, we had called our first meeting, and were encouraged to find not just a small group of interested people, but a total of over 70 educators who turned out to hear three visiting TESOL members (including the Second Vice President)

and then agreed to set up a provisional committee to draw up a constitution. The question of a name came up, and it was agreed that we must include the words Bilingual Education in the title. Just over a month later, a meeting formally established the Association, choosing as its name the New Mexico Association for TESOL and Bilingual Education. Representative teachers and educators were elected to the executive committee, which met in June to draw up plans for the 1969-70 year.

In October, the first Newsletter was printed, and it could announce the fact that the New Mexico State Department of Education had approved certification criteria for TESOL. A meeting had been planned for September or October with the First Vice President of TESOL, but Mary's changed plans led to putting this off. In October, however, a significant advance came when the Association went to the meeting of the long established Bilingual Education Section of the New Mexico Education Association, and persuaded them to join with us. The section, which had in the past organized a morning session at the NMEA convention, agreed to join us, and we agreed to organize the NMEA session.

In January, we took advantage of the great interest being shown in the Association in the west of the State,

and organized a meeting in Gallup, which was attended by a distinguished group from the national organization led by the President and Executive Secretary. About 150 teachers from all over the State turned up, again evidence of the base of interest.

Now we are working on the planning of a two-day convention of our own. What we are trying to do is to make sure that it brings teachers of non-English speaking children into contact with the parents of the children concerned, because we believe that the intersection of language and education is too important to be left either to experts or even teachers; we must be sure that there is understanding between teachers and parents, between school and community. We plan then to meet not in a hotel or a university, but in a school or community hall; we plan to invite local parents not just to attend, but to participate. We want to get down to the real grass roots, which doesn't just mean giving teachers a chance to listen to experts, but means getting experts, teachers, and community (parents, and hopefully even the children themselves) together to talk about and work out strategies to handle their problems. On the basis of our experience at this meeting, we hope to move out around the State, and encourage our members to organize similar meetings in their own local areas.

All of this, I believe, is vital; the area we are concerned with is too important, and too complex, for anyone to be allowed to try to impose a single simple solution and for any real action to be effective without deep involvement and sharing by all concerned.